

Q AND A'S ON *DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS, 2000*

What are the Dietary Guidelines for Americans?

- The Dietary Guidelines are 10 basic principles for healthy eating, grouped under an ABC scheme—Aim for fitness, Build a healthy base, and Choose sensibly...for good health. The guidelines under each group are:

Aim for fitness

*Aim for a healthy weight
Be physically active each day*

Build a healthy base

*Let the Pyramid guide your food choices
Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains
Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily
Keep food safe to eat*

Choose sensibly

*Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat
Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars
Choose and prepare foods with less salt
If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation*

Why are the Dietary Guidelines important?

- C They serve as the cornerstone of Federal nutrition policy.
- C They provide sound advice to help people make food choices for a healthy, active life.
- C They reflect a consensus of the most current science and medical knowledge available.

When were the Guidelines first issued? How often are they revised?

- C The Dietary Guidelines were first issued in 1980, and were revised in 1985, 1990, 1995, and

again this year.

- C The National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990 requires the Secretaries of Agriculture and Health and Human Services to jointly publish a report entitled *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* every 5 years.

Why do the Guidelines change?

- C The science base supporting the Dietary Guidelines is constantly changing. New scientific research, increased consensus among authorities on specific diet and health issues necessitated changes to the 1995 edition.

How are revisions determined?

- Since 1985, every 5 years a Federal advisory committee composed of widely recognized experts in nutrition, medicine, and epidemiology has been invited to review the Guidelines and propose revisions. The current committee made recommendations for revision to the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services after they examined the current scientific literature and heard comments from the public.
- The Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services independently and then jointly reviewed the committee recommendations, received and reviewed public comments, and considered research on consumer understanding of the Guidelines before finalizing the new edition of the Guidelines.

Who is the audience for the bulletin?

- C The guidelines can be used by any groups that are interested in improving the health of Americans. Such groups might include Federal and local policymakers, physicians, health professionals and educators, food industry and trade associations, media, and consumer organizations. They can also be used by individuals interested in improving their own health or that of their family.

Do the Dietary Guidelines make specific quantitative recommendations for nutrients and other food components?

- C Yes, in those cases where the scientific evidence is strong enough to support a quantitative recommendation. Since 1990, the Guidelines have recommended that no more than 30% of total calories come from fat, and that less than 10% of calories come from saturated fat.

- C For sodium and cholesterol, the Guidelines do not make a specific quantitative recommendation but refer readers to the Daily Values used on Nutrition Facts labels as a guide to recommended intake levels.
- C For nutrients and food components for which there is not enough scientific evidence to make a quantitative recommendation, the Guidelines provide directional guidance, e.g., “Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains” and “Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars.”

Do the Dietary Guidelines apply to children?

- C Yes, the Dietary Guidelines apply to healthy Americans two years of age and over.
- C Where appropriate, the Dietary Guidelines give more specific advice for children and adolescents. For example, the Guidelines discuss ways to improve calcium and iron intakes in children and teenagers. Also, they include sections with specific advice related to children, including encouraging healthy weight and increasing physical activity in children, in order to focus attention on the growing problem of childhood obesity.

Will following the Dietary Guidelines make me healthier?

- C For most Americans, yes. Four of the leading causes of death in the United States are linked to diet, namely heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes. Taken together, diet-related health conditions cost society about \$250 billion annually in medical costs and lost productivity. Thirty to forty percent of deaths due to cancer can be prevented if people will choose a healthful diet and perform physical activity.
- C A medical research study recently found that following a diet based on Dietary Guidelines principles was associated with decreased mortality in a group of adult women.
- It is important to recognize, however, that individuals vary in their responses to dietary change; thus, health improvements will be greater for some than others.

Are Americans' diets changing in the direction of the Dietary Guidelines' recommendations?

- Yes and no. The percentage of calories from fat in the American diet has fallen from 37% to 33% of total calories from fat over the last decade. However, the actual intake of fat in grams has not decreased over this time span. Saturated fat intake has also decreased when expressed as a percentage of calories.

- Other aspects of the American diet still need improving. The increasing prevalence of obesity means that we are eating more calories and/or exercising less than we need to maintain healthy weight. Many people are also eating less than the recommended numbers of servings of fruits, vegetables and whole grain products, and more sugars and salt than are needed for good health. For example, according to the Healthy Eating Index released by USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, only about 17% of people eat the recommended number of servings of fruit, and only about 31% eat the recommended number of servings of vegetables.

What's new about the 2000 edition of the Dietary Guidelines bulletin?

- The emphasis on certain topics has changed to *reflect emerging science* and to be consistent with diet and health messages from other Federal agencies. For example,
 - The fat guideline was reworded to place increased emphasis on the need to reduce the consumption of saturated fat because of its association with heart disease. The recommendation for limiting total fat was changed from "low in fat" to "moderate in total fat." The upper limit on total fat intake remains at 30%, as in previous editions of the Guidelines. The role of trans fatty acids in raising blood cholesterol is also recognized.
 - The weight guideline was reworded to "Aim for a healthy weight" because of the overwhelming scientific evidence about the health risks of overweight and obesity. This guideline is consistent with guidance about obesity from the National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and the National Institute of Diabetes, Digestive and Kidney Diseases.
 - The order of the guidelines was changed to emphasize healthy weight and physical activity and a separate guideline on activity was included, "Be physically active each day." The physical activity guideline is consistent with guidance in the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity.
 - In recognition of growing concerns about foodborne illness, a new guideline on consumer food safety was added, "Keep food safe to eat." Keeping food safe is a critical element in ensuring that consumers know what and how to eat to stay healthy.
- Other changes in the Guidelines were made in an attempt to make the *messages more practical and actionable*. For example:
 - The 1995 fruits, vegetables and grains guideline was separated into two guidelines

because of differences in the food groups, and the text was made more actionable: (e.g. “Eat a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains” and “Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables daily”). Expanded emphasis was placed on plant foods as an important foundation of healthful eating.

- The Guideline “Eat a variety of foods,” was replaced with “Let the Pyramid guide your food choices.” [See below for the reason for this change.]
- The sodium guideline was reworded from “Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium” to “Choose and prepare foods with less salt” to focus on actions consumers can take that will result in a diet moderate in sodium. The word “sodium” was removed from the title, and difference between sodium and salt was clarified in the text.
- The sugar guideline was reworded from “Choose a diet moderate in sugars” to “Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars” to focus on major sources of sugars in the American diet.
- A grouping scheme—“Aim for fitness, Build a healthy base, and Choose sensibly...for good health”—was added to the Guidelines in an attempt to make them *more memorable to consumers*.
 - The grouping theme organizes the guidelines into an easy-to-remember “ABC’s for good health” format.
 - The grouping was included, in part, because the number of guidelines increased from seven to ten. The grouping also links guidelines with similar messages, so that they will be easy for consumers to remember.

Why did the guidelines focus on three (ABC’s) major messages: Aim for fitness; Build a healthy base; Choose sensibly?

- Numerous studies indicate that consumers want messages that are simple, memorable, and meaningful. The ABCs for good health group the guidelines into 3 categories to help consumers remember them and follow their suggestions for changing dietary behavior.

Why was the guideline to eat a variety of foods changed in the 2000 edition of the Dietary Guidelines?

- C There were three reasons for rewording the variety guideline to “let the Pyramid guide your food choices”:

- (1) To better convey the purpose of the guideline as ensuring nutritional adequacy. Research shows that choosing foods from all the food groups improves nutritional adequacy.
 - (2) To avoid possible misinterpretation of the variety message as encouraging overconsumption of calories.
 - (3) To reference the Food Guide Pyramid, which serves as the core of many nutrition education activities and is widely recognized.
- C The importance of “variety” is emphasized in the grain and fruit and vegetable guidelines. Choosing a variety of different foods from these groups is recommended for good health.

What is the industry's position on the Dietary Guidelines?

- C The public, including industry was invited to offer USDA and HHS oral comments on the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee report and proposed text for the Dietary Guidelines. Written comments were also accepted until March 15, 2000. USDA and HHS received and reviewed more than 1000 comments from the public and industry groups.
- C In general, the food industry supports the Dietary Guidelines. The Dietary Guidelines Alliance was formed in 1995 as a partnership among food industry, government and health organizations to help consumers implement the Guidelines. Alliance members seek to develop, through consumer research, effective messages about nutrition, taste, and physical activity that can be used in education, counseling, and communication initiatives.
- C Certain industry groups have encouraged USDA and DHHS to take a stronger stand on issues ranging from vegetarian diets to supplement use. In the future, should the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, charged with revising the guidelines, propose stronger language on the basis of the scientific evidence to USDA and DHHS, Department officials would consider such recommendations at that time.